

Washington State Patrol Media Release

Chief Ronal W. Serpas



Office of the State Fire Marshal *State Fire Marshal Mary Corso*

Captain Glenn Cramer
Government and Media Relations
(360) 753-5299 – office
(360) 753-5469 – fax
<http://www.wa.gov>

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Contact: Chief Deputy State Fire Marshal Anjela Foster
(360) 753-0493

College Fraternity House Fire Stopped By One Sprinkler Head

Shortly after 9 p.m. on May 14, 2003, a fire started in a plastic garbage can in the first floor kitchen of a three-story 7,000-sq.-ft. fraternity house on the campus of Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington. The contents of the garbage can fueled the rapid growth of the fire. Deadly heat and smoke quickly began spreading across the ceiling. A disaster in the making?

Fortunately for the students housed in this home, it was not. Whitman College's "Life Cycle Committee" had, several years earlier, set a goal to have all campus residence halls and fraternities protected by fire alarm and fire sprinkler systems.

When the fire department arrived a few minutes after being notified of the fire, they found one sprinkler head had extinguished the fire. Within a very short time of the fire, things were pretty much back to normal for the 33 students living there.

"Students at Whitman have enough pressure on them in getting an education without having the added pressure of being concerned about fire and life safety issues," says Whitman College Physical Plant Director Dan Park.

The one million dollar retrofit program has so far provided fire alarm and fire sprinkler systems in eight student residence halls and four fraternities.

"With the continued support and assistance of the Walla Walla Fire Dept. and local fire sprinkler contractors, we hope to meet our goal of having fire sprinkler systems in all Whitman College residence halls by the summer of 2003," says Whitman College Construction Project Manager Jeff Donahue.

"Whitman College should be congratulated for their commitment to not only providing an atmosphere conducive to the educational process of their students, but also for taking a proactive approach in addressing the fire and life safety issues of their students" says State Fire Marshal Mary Corso.

The Office of the State Fire Marshal is a Bureau of the Washington State Patrol, providing fire and life safety services to the citizens of Washington State, including inspections of state-licensed facilities, plan review of school construction projects, licensing of fire sprinkler contractors and pyrotechnic operators, training Washington State's firefighters, and collecting emergency response data. For additional information, you may visit our web page at <http://www.wa.gov/wsp/wsphome.htm> and then click on State Fire Marshal.

For more information on fire sprinkler systems, contact your local fire department or the Office of the State Fire Marshal at (360) 753-0400.

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